

JOHNNY THOMASON (INDIAN), FRIDAY HARBOR, SAN
JUAN ISLAND, WASH., AUGUST 13, 1895.

(Interviewed by Richard Rathbun).

Lives on Stewart Island.

Q. You are a young man yet. How old are you?

A. Well, I could not tell you exactly; either 30 or 31.

Q. I want to know more particularly about the salmon which run in this region and which are taken for the canneries and for other purposes. Now, the sockeye salmon, where do the sockeye run from? Where do they come from when they come up here?

A. Well, look here; now, here there is the salmon we are getting now, the sockeye, it comes from the west across out in here, right from the Straits. Well, where they start from I dont know, but they come from the west coast of the Straits.

Q. Where do they find them in the Straits? Where do they first see them?

A. Well, I tell you, so it is; they come

from the west coast, and it is on both sides; a narrow channel, and after they come in from the Straits it is between 2 sides; here from Neah Bay or the other coast, so I could not guess the thing straight enough, but they come from the whole Straits occasionally.

Q. Well, when they get at this end of the Straits, what do they do then? What becomes of the salmon?

A. Well, when they come in from the gulf they are past this channel, and then they divide up wherever the tide takes them. We get our salmon at Stewart Island, and of course the other sections of the tide, it is dividing up; that is, the tide leads the salmon.

Q. The salmon come in and up through Haro Straits by Stewart Island?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. And some through Rosario Straits?

A. Yes, sir; some come through there sure, and that is all the place they have to go.

Q. They dont go over between San Juan and Lopez?

A. No; they dont go through there. That

is, for the sockeye.

Q. Do they go up through Active Pass, or Plumper's Pass, do you know?

A. That I could not tell you, because I never was up there, but I know they dont go through there.

Q. Have you ever fished on the Fraser?

A. No, I never did, but I know what is going there, as I have friends.

Q. Are you acquainted with the Prince of Wales?

A. Oh, yes; I know him all right.

Q. Do you fish with the reef net around Stewart Island?

A. Yes; I fish with the reef net around Stewart Island.

Q. What do you fish for there, only the sockeye?

A. Well, I take the whole of the fish that come into the cannery. I fish for the silver sides in the fall, August and September.

Q. Do you catch spring salmon, with your nets the same way---tyee salmon?

A. Yes; it is the same thing.

Q. Do you get humpback in your nets?

A. Yes, we get them right along.

Q. The same as the sockeye?

A. Yes, the same as the sockeye.

Q. Do you get dog salmon that way too?

A. Yes, we get them just the same.

Q. Your fish are alive when you lift your net?

A. Yes, they are alive.

Q. What do you do with the humpback salmon

A. We divide them up among the old folks.

We use them.

Q. You dry them?

A. Yes, we dry them.

Q. You like them just as well as the other salmon dried?

A. Oh, yes; they are just as good, but they cannot can them. We use them for our own use that is all, and drying; and it is all put up for ourselves, you see.

Q. Where do they use reef nets?

A. Now, hold on; what is the meaning of these questions?

Q. It is for the United States Commission

in Washington; we are studying the habits of the fish everywhere in order to understand the different fisheries so as to see if they need any regulation or any protection. For instance around Point Roberts they are fishing a great many traps.

A. Yes, and they had some laws about it too. They sent for me and I went over there to see what they were talking about and get the men to understand it (He is an interpreter for his friends).

Q. What I want to get at is this: the general course of the fish. Now, where do you fish with reef nets on Stewart Island?

A. On the south end of the island. We fish at the south point at the harbor, and I have my rig just inside here.

Q. Do they fish in other places around Stewart Island?

A. There are lots of fishing places there.

Q. Do they fish along the west side of San Juan Island?

A. Yes, they do.

Q. In many places?

A. Many places, yes; that is all fishing ground in there. You could put 50 or 60 nets in there and it would be all right. It was all fishing ground in the early days, of course. There are not so many people now to do the business.

Q. But they dont fish in San Juan channel?

A. On the inside, no. But they fish on Lopez.

Q. Where do they fish there?

A. On a sandy point at the west end of the island. One crew is fishing in Lopez Sound and the other at the southern end of Lopez Island, by Jenny's Point. Look here, Mister, you are working at the Commission; have you authority to protect anybody or not?

Q. No; I have no authority at all in that way.

A. You are just getting the ground?

Q. Yes, just getting information. Where the trouble comes in at Point Roberts it is to go before the United States judge at Seattle, and he will do everything he can in the matter. Now, are the salmon just as abundant now as they

used to be? Do you get just as many now as you used to?

A. Well, I tell you, we used to have salmon in larger abundance in early days than we have now. We can never raise that amount now. In fact, I could not tell you where they are, but it is fewer in the same places.

Q. When do the spring salmon run here? What part of the year do you have them in the salt water?

A. Well, it is a part of the last of September the spring salmon run.

Q. Dont you get them in the winter?

A. Yes, we get them right through the winter.

Q. When do you begin to get them in the spring?

A. We begin to get them in the spring a month before May, in April, about the 15th or 20th they will commence; and right along until May; that is spring salmon. Oh, we get them as much as 60 lbs., and some will go 80 lbs.

Q. Are many of the spring salmon white?

A. I will tell you here; that is just the season of the salmon; they change off on the

season.

Q. What season do they get the most white salmon?

A. It is in May we would get the most white salmon.

Q. What makes them white then?

A. I tell you that is their nature. Sometimes they get one side white and one side all red. They just change their color at the end of the year you see, and it is in May; we always can find them in May between half and half, but I could not tell you what is the reason of it. They change right off quickly, and you cannot tell, but it is in May.

Q. Do you do any halibut fishing around here?

A. Yes, a little of it.

Q. How do you catch halibut; do you use your own big hooks?

A. Yes, we use our own hooks, but I use those iron hooks most of the time, but I use the other hooks just as well and they are just as good.

Q. What do you use for bait?

A. What we use, is what we call---

Q. Herring?

A. No, not herring; herring do not do as well. It is devil fish.

Q. Where do you get the devil fish?

A. Oh, get it anywhere; all around the islands.

Q. Has 8 long arms?

A. Yes, 8 legs.

Q. Where do you catch the devil fish?

A. Well, I tell you; we take a stick to them and poke them down. Anything you ask, Mister, I will answer. I am an old hand from the beginning.

Q. How big do you get those devil fish here?

A. Oh, not a great size.

Q. Now, when the silver salmon comes in; the silver salmon comes up all among the islands does it not? It does not follow the same course of the sockeye?

A. No, no; it takes every channel; that is you mean the coho?

Q. Yes.

A. It takes every channel.

Q. Now, the dog salmon?

A. The dog salmon go just the same as the silver side.

Q. How about the steelhead?

A. Well, I tell you, that comes in very late in the winter, a little before Christmas that comes in and lasts all winter until spring.

Q. Do you get any other kinds of salmon?

A. The steelhead is the last salmon in the season.

Q. The spring salmon, do they mix up or do they go like the sockeye, or get scattered all over?

A. Well, I tell you, they are going straight along.

Q. They dont get mixed up?

A. No, they dont get mixed up at all.

Q. Dont you get them among these islands?

A. Well, we get a few, but that is not a lot at all. You see, the time they would be, the last of September, and that will last until Christmas anyhow, but that is as far as it goes.

Q. Do you get any trout?

A. No, not in the islands.

Q. There are no streams on San Juan or Orcas Island into which the salmon go?

A. No, there is no stream at all.

Q. That is big enough?

A. No, not big enough. I was away once to Victoria 2 or 3 days, and I left the business there and a Port Angeles boat came over there and did us damage. The boys were telling them where the anchors were and everything else, but they laughed at them and dropped the anchors and wrecked the whole business for us. It was a fishing boat from the Port Angeles cannery. They just came to play devilment and did not want any fish.

Q. Have you no justice of the peace over at Stewart Island?

A. No.

Q. Where is your justice of the peace?

A. Well, he is in Friday Harbor.

Q. Why dont you go to him and find out?

A. Well, I want to find out quietly what is the right and wrong. They had their net in there and did not want to buy fish, and they just wanted to bully us.

Q. Did they do much damage?

A. Damage! they left us 7 days' damage, and had to repair everything.

Q. Have you ever been over to Lummi Island?

A. Well, most of my folks are living there.

Q. Is there good fishing there?

A. Good fishing ground at Lummi Island; that is on the west side of it.

Q. Is there any fish on the east side of it?

A. Well; the fish on the east side is very late in the fall, silver sides.

Q. They are fishing 2 pound nets over there now are they not?

A. I could not tell you how many nets they run in there, but they could have nets in there, as many as they want to because it is a whole fishing ground on the west side of it.

Q. You sell fish to the cannery here dont you, to Mr. Devlin?

A. Well, I am selling fish to Mr. Devlin, but now they are paying the folks at Lummi Island 15 cents now; here they only give us 10 and that is a different question altogether.

It is like this: Devlin, he is a nice man all right enough, but then it is like this: I got the crew to work and I have got to pay them of course, and I am entitled to get whatever the salmon come to. I have two or three hundred dollars to pay out to the boys this morning.

Q. How do you send your fish down here?

A. On the steamer.

Q. Lydia Thompson?

A. No; on the Michigan.

Q. She came in last night.

A. Yes; they brought salmon in from Lummi Island, and they had to pay 15 cents, and my salmon is just as good. I brought the boys over here to get squared up with their bills and I came down to pay them off.

Q. What do you think of the fishery generally; is it going to keep up all right; are the fish going to keep up or are they going to decrease?

A. Now?

Q. Yes, in the course of a few years?

A. Well, I could not tell; there has been a failure this last 2 or 4 years. Now, for the time I have been fishing---I have been fishing

pretty near all my life---and it has been dropping every year, one with the other.

Q. Sockeyes?

A. Sockeyes have been dropping every year less and less. What that means I dont know, but there is something in that.

Q. The humpback keeps up?

A. They keep up of course; nobody disturbs them, and the dog salmon keep up the same.

Q. How about the silver sides?

A. Well, the silver sides, take the same run, it dont affect them; nobody catches them. But the sockeye seems to be a failure every year,

Q. Well, there are 2 good years and 2 bad years aren't there? Do you have 2 good years and 2 bad years? ~

A. Well, I will tell you; I have fished for 16 years, from a boy. Now, here there is a bad year for sockeyes; now this year is all right enough, it is a big run. Next year it will be in the soup; nothing to catch. You will get 3 or 4 days fishing and that is all.

Q. What will the next year be?

A. After next year a good run begins---all kinds of salmon. Next year it is only sockeyes

Q. You dont get any humpback next year?

A. No humpback only every other year.

Q. Do you get the silver sides every year?

A. Yes, we get them every year right

through.

Q. Did you ever catch a sockeye with a hook and line?

A. You cannot. You cannot force them on any way.

Q. The other salmon you can catch by hook and line?

A. The spring salmon? Yes you can catch them, but you cannot catch the humpback.

Q. But you can the silver side?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. And the dog salmon?

A. No, the dog salmon and sockeye dont take anything, and the humpback dont take anything at all. Silver sides and spring salmon take the hook.

Q. Have you seen any dog salmon this year?

A. Yes, a few come in the net now. I was on the wharf last night and it was a dog salmon.

Q. When the boat came in what was the big

brown cod; did you see it?

A. No, I did not. There was a sturgeon.

Q. Do you eat the green sturgeon here?

A. Oh, well; we dont have much sturgeon here.